

ROBINSON CHARLEY, A FILM SHOWN AT ON OUR WAY

Robinson Charley, notes based on viewing at British Film Institute, October 13, 2006.

Amended Version of Commentary for Charley makes ends meet

Map of British Isles, with lines indicating how commerce worked with the rest of the world, with **voiceover**:

Ahem, Today, the British Isles support a dense population. This population cannot exist upon the natural products of the country, but gains its livelihood by trading manufactured goods for food and raw materials. To see how this came about, let us examining Britain's economic history.

Taking as a case...

Charley pulls up the map, as if it were a screen, and interrupts:

Scene 3: Here! Turn it up! I thought this film was going to be about me

Narrator responds:

All right then, have it your way.

Charley pulls screen down, and the following scene appears:

1st scene: 1690

Music pastoral, soothing, but upbeat

Idyllic island: nice little house at the center, with a path leading from the back, another leading from the front, connecting it to the storage shed on the left, and the boathouse on the right. In the initial scene Charley is sheering sheep in front of the boathouse, next to the corral, his wife (Mrs. Charley) is turning the wool into usable thread, rocking her baby's cradle with her foot, then Charley is seen at a loom turning the thread into wool cloth. He then carries the cloth into the "store"

(Basic analogy to what Robinson Crusoe established on his primitive island exact: a home, a corral, a storage space, and eventually a "port." This took the longest.)

Once upon a time there was an island; and on it lived Charley, and his wife and son.

Scene 2: Storehouse (organized with shelves)

Inside the storehouse we see: on the left side, 2 shelves with a wood box, ceramic containers, candles; on the floor on the left a big box, contents unknown; in the middle: dried meat hanging, sausages hanging, dried fish hanging, on the floor in front, a wooden barrel; on the right side: 2 shelves, bottom shelf: a white can with the word "spices" (hard to make out, will zoom in later); another ceramic container, and a third nondescript container, on the shelf above, bolts of cloth, on the floor a sack of something (grain?), and a wicker basket.

(Here we have all the necessities for subsistence, very like the storage unit that Robinson Crusoe sets up as soon as he arrives on the island, and takes stock of what he has, right down to the details—the wax for candles, the sack of grain, the ceramic pots for water, the barrel for spirits, the wicker baskets he figures out how to make.)

For many years—for centuries—the island was self-supporting. The farm grew enough food for the whole family.

Scene 3: Inside the storehouse, a close-up of "surplus goods" vs. "luxury" goods, or the bolts of cloth (which will from here on stand for "exports") and spices (which stand for imports or luxury goods). (NOTE: decision made to eliminate SUGAR in favor of spices)

If Charley needed some luxury that he couldn't make himself, he could always sell a few surplus goods and buy what he needed from abroad.

Scene 4: Charley's boathouse—he goes in with bolts of cloth, rows across the screen and back, whistling, happy journey, no contact or sign of transaction on the other side; he simply returns with sacks of spices.

Life went on like this until about 200 years ago, when Charley started to use machinery to make his goods.

Scenes 5 and 6:

5) Charley in steamboat leaving the boathouse, now returning with three times more goods (3 sacks instead of one), music louder, more upbeat.

6) Charley putting his 3 stacks in “store”

It didn't take Charley long to find out that making goods paid better than just farming by itself.

Scene 7: a) Buildings growing (sign of prosperity), first the storage shed, then the boathouse, then the house now near a factory. The last thing to change in this scene is the smokestack of the factory that pops up and starts pumping out smoke.

And as his prosperity increased, so did the population.

Scene 7:b) Babies popping up on lawn in front of the house in cradles

It was a time of tremendous expansion for Charley.

Scene 8: Out in front of factory railroad tracks appear on what had been a path, but as we saw already in the very first scene, already in place as a path to the boathouse, so the inevitability, the potential for this expansion and prosperity was written in from the very start. Now cars carrying lots of goods to the boathouse, they come out the other end in a big steamship loaded down with boxes of goods.

Charley was the most go-ahead manufacturer and trader in the world.

Scene 9: Series of other islands for the first time shown.

- a) What must be Europe: French music playing, first thing we see is a storefront marked “café” with a table, umbrella and chairs; windmill implies Holland, the rest hard to decipher. No people present for trading, but boathouse there, set up as natural trading partners.
- b) Music American folk, image includes a teepee in the front, pine trees, mountains. Again, boathouse and pier naturalizes this island as a trading partner, although again, no people present.

Being first on the market his goods got a good rate of exchange. .

Scene 10: Third island appears c) Latin America, clearly, with Spanish looking architecture in front, mountains in the back.

But now another thing happened. Charley was doing so well that he was able to build big engineering works in other countries.

Once he had got things working he was paid the profits in cash or in kind.

Boat arrives and lays railroad as it goes over the hill, wraps around the mountains.

In the end he owned quite a lot of property abroad, and started up banks and all sorts of other businesses.

Scene 11: Names appear on what were only outlines of things before. The boathouse becomes a more solid structure, now marked, “Charley Shipping Agent”; the Spanish style house at the center now says, “Charley’s Railroad,” and next to it a smaller structure pops up, marked “Bank”. Sacs fly out of the bank and into the boat, with the steamship pumping “Woo Woo”—sacks of money? Looks like it.

Scene 12: Two boats shown, full of bags, boats themselves marked “FOR HIRE”

This made things easier at home.

Scene 13: Houses and things popping up. The House at the center is now pink, more beautiful, one can see lace curtains. In front of the house there is now a formal looking table with a white linen tablecloth, with an umbrella and two chairs. The storage shed is very large.

Now Charley only had to work for two-thirds of all his imports. He could pay for the other one-third out of the income from his overseas investments.

Scene 14: Charley walking out of the factory with sheet in hand, replacing white square to the left of the door (which was there from the beginning), so that what read: “Hours: 7-7” now reads “Hours 8-6”. In this frame Charley is wearing work clothes. But he walks across the lawn, joins his wife for tea, and is now wearing a suit and tie, and Mrs. Charley is in pink, Victorian skirt, white ruffled shirt, baby in cradle. Now is when we get a good glimpse of the lace curtains on the pink house behind them.

Scene 15: 8 babies in the cradles

But while Charley was resting on his laurels, other countries were getting industrialized,

Scene 16: Charley snoring in his seat (while other countries getting industrialized)....

and their exports were beginning to edge on to some of Charley’s markets. But did that worry him?

Charley shakes his head no in his sleep.

(no)

But he was going to be VERY worried.

Scene 17 segue ways into scene 18:

Charley pops up out of his chair, drops back down as a soldier with a gun in uniform, helmet, heading towards the boathouse. Initial vehicle more rudimentary, transforms into a tank (signifying shift from WWI to WWII), going across landscape.

[In fact, the next 30 years were going to knock the props from under Charley’s trade.] [omitted from original script]

Two wars were to be fought.

Scene 19: Through the boathouse, Charley now out on a ship that transforms into a warship; airplane appears. All “commercial” transport transformed into military transport and weapons.

Scene 20: Mom running with children to a shelter, she puts on overalls and a cap (looking very mannish) and walks into a factory marked “munitions factory” where the hours posted are “7 to 7” again! Front of factory kind of a mess.

**Charley’s exports went by the board.
His overseas property had to be sold to pay for the war.**

Scene 21: Island in LA with RR marked “SOLD”

Scene 22: Shipping business marked “SOLD”

Scene 23: Ships in water attacked.

His ships, which used to bring him in a lot of money, were sunk.

Scene 24: Charley going home in civilian clothes on boat that seems in ill-repair, music like a broken record.

The wars ended.

Scene 25→26: Boathouse all messed up, with broken slats on roof, kids lined up to meet and greet dad with sign marked “Welcome home”, dad coming up to the boathouse in his messed up boat.

26: Back up so you can see whole island is in disrepair.

Main house is being rebuilt. Even the tree is pathetic looking. The landscape is lunar like in coloring. The factory is in tatters.

Charley needed to import as much as he had done before, but he’d lost his overseas income which used to pay for a third of these imports.

Everything being repaired until the last thing, scene 27: the smoke stack puffing, then narrator says:

The only thing to do was to get his factory working again and to make up the difference by exporting more goods.

Scene 28: Charley driving railroad toward boathouse filled with more and more goods over the years.

He worked very hard and increased his output enormously.

Scene 28a: 1948 has 5 boxes, 1 sac; 1947 had 5 boxes, 1946 had 4 boxes, 1945 only 2 boxes.

Good going.

Scene 29: In boat Charley taking those goods to trade

But there were disappointments in store.

Scene 30: Boat pulling up to Europe island, ruined boat house, ruins of what used to be the café, singed windmill, smoke rising.

The war had laid a lot of countries waste, especially in Europe.

Scene 31: same but in flames now.

There was a world shortage of food and raw materials.

Scene 32: Charley going across the ocean to a beautiful, modern island, clearly NYC, getting more beautiful by the moment, with lots of bustling and business, a narrator says,

Everyone wanted them and so prices rose.

(Basic message—war killed Britain and made US FAT) Image of NYC lots of factories, tall smokestacks, pumping smoke into the air, lots of piers waiting to receive ships.

Scene 33: Charley pulls up in what looks like an old-fashioned boat and pulls out with three sacks, **Charley's business was losing money fast.** Scene 33a: which as the boat moves, turn into three sacks that look really small to Charley.

Things looked bad indeed.

Scene 34: Music picks up and in comes big ocean liner steamship with stuff.

Welcome relief was on the way. American Aid provided Charley with part of his imports as a loan or as a gift.

But American Aid doesn't mean more for Charley. It only gives him time so that he can prepare to pay his own way in the world.

Scene 35: Ship of goods vanishes. Charley looks perplexed with ? over his head.
Charley pulls up a screen:

Well, what if I don't?

Screen comes back down:

This happens.

Scene 36: Boat with goods that keep diminishing in size and number

Each time you go out you'll have less and less and less to sell.

Scene 37: same in reverse direction: man at helm, returning in boat with less and less goods. "can buy less and less"

Because each time you'll be able to buy less and less food and raw materials.

Text added: **Once you lose your means of earning your living, your living standard will go** narration for succession of scenes 38-43)

Scene 38: On island, totally bombed out, from boathouse to factory. Factory marked "Closed" with broken windows.

Scene 39: Factory disintegrates, ends with smokestack falling

Scene 40: Boathouse disappearing, then boat

Scene 41: Crows flying around, burnt out, abandoned home—looks like Berlin in the rubble

Scene 42: Storehouse gone too,... mere remnants of even what was there in "subsistence" period

Scene 43: Old haggard looking Charley and wife, in rags (Charley barefoot and unshaven, looking terribly uncivilized)

Charley pulls screen up:

It doesn't have to be like that!

Narrator responds: **No... but it MIGHT!**

Charley: **Ah, it could just as well work out like this.**

Scene 44: Island beautiful, everything restored, factory with smoke coming out of the smokestack.

Scene 45: Factory with sign in middle front: “THE OLD FIRM WITH NEW METHODS” and the sign next the door now marked “Hours 7 to 7”

Charley: **I’d start by getting organized a bit better.**

Scene 46: Second set of tracks from factory to boathouse.

Charley: **And exporting things people really want.**

Scene 47: Lots of cars of train with stuff, marked “Machinery for Empire” “Coal for France” “Textiles for America”

Scene 48: Zooming out of boathouse, on streamlined, modern looking ship. Music very silly, high-pitched following boat as it hits shores of Europe

Some of the things I need can only be got from Canada and the U.S.A.

Scene 49: Boats zipping in and out of harbors—this looks like LA

But there’s lots of thing I could get from other places instead.

Scene 50: Image of what looks like Australia

Pigs from Australia, f’r instance...

Ground nuts from Africa (“marg” to you)...

Scene 51: Image of Africa

Scene 52: Clearly Europe looking much better, with windmills working, and factories in what is probably Germany (it’s in the middle between Holland and France), café set up once again in France with chair and umbrella.

Food from Europe...

Scene 52A: see big fields of wheat

And they’d be glad to have the things I export...

And of course the best way to cut down on imports is “to produce things for ourselves and especially more food from our own fields).

Scene 53: Beautifully groomed, productive island, with agriculture, manufacturing and trading all taking place. Tilled fields behind the house, sheep in a corral, house has cows grazing beside it, beautiful trees in front of the house, nice, upgraded factory and boathouse. Factory pumping out stacks, railroad from factory to boathouse and then end.

Scene 54: Charley raised shade and winks.